

Who Belongs Together?: Children's Perceptions of Interracial Families and Multiracial Children

Dr. Brigitte Vittrup, Principal Investigator and Rachel Herrera, Research Assistant

PURPOSE, RESEARCH QUESTIONS, & BACKGROUND

The purpose of this study is to investigate the beliefs and perceptions children have on the racial makeup of families, the affects race has on children's perceptions of human character, and how race affects socialization.

This poster showcases the preliminary results of the study, with 35/100 child interviews completed.

This is a preliminary study, as there is little to no research in this area. This study will potentially act as a catalyst to promote further research to help those working with children and families gain a general understanding of children's complex racial attitudes.

Research Questions

- Do children have different perceptions of interracial families/multiracial children compared to same-race families/monoracial children?
- Are children's perceptions of interracial families and multiracial children influenced by their own race and family background or by the racial composition of their friends?
- Do children's monoracial attitudes influence their perceptions of interracial families?

Background & Literature

- The population of multiracial individuals is growing, but that does not mean the bias or prejudice toward minority populations is declining.
- Negative stereotypes of minority races are still being depicted in videogames and on television (Tukachinsky, Mastro, & Yarchi, 2015)
- An estimated 14% of U.S. babies were multiracial and an estimated 17% of marriages were interracial in 2015 (Pew Research Center, 2017).
- Children engage in conversations with a "sophisticated understanding of racial and ethnic concepts" as young as 3 years old (Van Ausdale & Feagin, 1996).
- Young children's racial attitudes and biases are acquired through "learning, conformity, and contact" (Aboud, 2005).

METHODS

Part 1: Constructing Families

Young children of various racial backgrounds, ages 5-8, are asked to form ideal families with dolls of several skin tones (Black, White, and Biracial).

Questions are asked about each family they created from Lovelace & Scheiner's (1994) Sesame Street curriculum on race, e.g.

- Are these kids well behaved?
- What kind of house do they live in?
- Would you like to play with the kids in this family? Why?



Part 2: Racial Identity

Children are asked questions about their own racial makeup and that of their friends, e.g.

- What is your race/skin color?
- Do you have any friends of a different race/skin color than you? If so, how many? What is their race/skin color?

Part 3: Racial Attitudes Measure

Children are given a standard measure known as the Black/White Evaluative Scale (BETS) from Hughes & Bigler (2007).

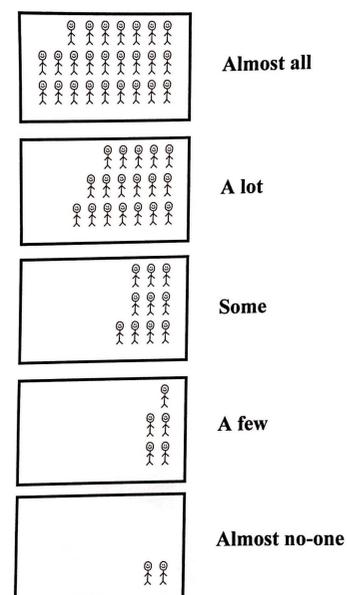
Children are given pages with images of Black, White, and biracial Black/White people.

The participant is then asked questions about the character of the people in the photographs and answer by pointing to the amount of people of that race it applies to.

METHODS

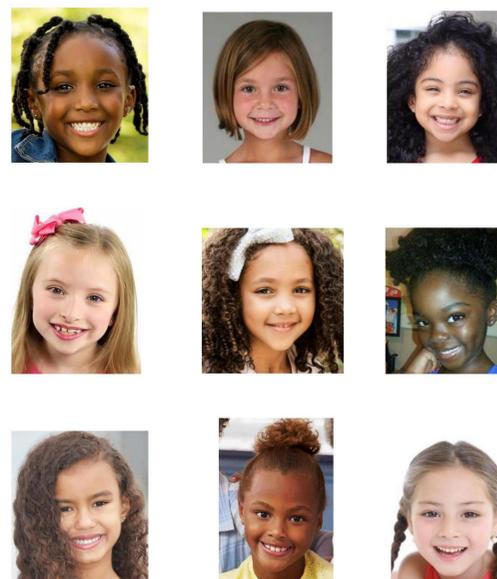
Part 3: Racial Attitudes, cont.

- How many White people are nice?
- How many Black people are mean?
- How many mixed Black and White people are bad and do bad things?



Part 4: Social Choice Task

Children are asked to choose 3 children from the pictures to sit by at lunch and 3 friends from the pictures for a playdate.



RESULTS & IMPLICATIONS

- Young children (5-8 years old) demonstrate understanding of racial concepts, even if they do not have the explicit vocabulary to express it.
 - ☺ "The mom and dad... even though they're not the same color, they're married and help the kid"
 - ☹ "There's two white persons and one black"... "I like that the mom and the kid are both white"
- Children are expressing understanding of dolls having "the same" or "different skin colors", yet have not shown an overt understanding of their own race; from all of the interviews completed so far (34), none (0) of the children have responded to the question "What is your race?". When asked about their skin color, many children will look at their skin and state the first color that comes to their mind, e.g.
 - ☹ "Chocolate"
 - ☹ "Peach"
 - ☹ "Blonde"
- During the Social Choice Task, children are overwhelmingly more likely to choose White children (4.14/6 children chosen) to play with because they
 - ☹ "Look nice"
 - ☹ "Have a nice smile"

References:

- Aboud, F. E. (2005). The Development of Prejudice in Childhood and Adolescence. In J. F. Dovidio, P. Glick, & L. A. Rudman (Eds.), *On the nature of prejudice: Fifty years after Allport* (pp. 310-326).
- Hughes, J. M., & Bigler, R. (2007, March). Development and validation of new measures of racial stereotyping and prejudice. Poster presented at the Biennial Meeting of the Society for Research in Child Development, Boston, Massachusetts.
- Lovelace, V., & Scheiner, S. (1994). Making a neighbourhood the Sesame Street way: Developing a methodology to evaluate children's understanding of race. *Journal of Educational Television*, 20, 69-78.
- Pew Research Center (2017). *The rise of multiracial and multiethnic babies in the U.S.* Retrieved from: <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2017/06/06/the-rise-of-multiracial-and-multiethnic-babies-in-the-u-s/>
- Tukachinsky, R., Mastro, D., & Yarchi, M. (2015). Documenting Portrayals of Race/Ethnicity on Primetime Television over a 20-Year Span and Their Association with National-Level Racial/Ethnic Attitudes. *Journal of Social Issues*, 71(1), 17-38.
- Van Ausdale, D., & Feagin, J. (1996). Using Racial and Ethnic Concepts: The Critical Case of Very Young Children. *American Sociological Review*, 61(5), 779-793.